

Breaking down the biggest event of the year: WrestleMania

VIEW FROM THE SIDELINE

by Tony von Richter

It's that time of year again, and 20 years after 93,173 fans witnessed Hulk Hogan body-slam Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III in the Pontiac Silverdome, WrestleMania is back in Detroit. This Sunday more than 70,000 fans will descend on Ford Field for the 23rd iteration of the event. This year's event looks like it should be entertaining so let's break down the matches announced as of press time.

Great Khali vs. Kane

There's a good chance that this will be one of the worst matches in WrestleMania history. As impressive as seeing two giants square off is, Khali can barely move and Kane isn't as talented as he used to be, so this one will be ugly. I'd expect Khali to get the win since WWE seems to have more invested in him than Kane at this point.

Money in the Bank Ladder Match

Always a contender for match of the night, the addition of two competitors, bringing the total to eight, could lead to some innovative spots that should help set this year's match apart from the previous two.

The talent in this match is impressive with Edge and the Hardys being well known for their previous ladder match exploits. First time WrestleMania combatants CM Punk and Ken Kennedy should be looking to make a name for themselves, so one or both will probably try to steal the show. As for a winner, it really could go any way (well, except to Matt Hardy) but Mr. Kennedy will probably walk out as Mr. Money in the Bank, leading to some hilarious promos

for as long as he has the moniker.

United States Champion Chris Benoit vs. MVP

MVP isn't exactly the second coming of Harley Race or Ric Flair, but he has been improving both in the ring and as a character, and, as the expression goes, Chris Benoit could wrestle a broom to a good match, so this one should be okay.

With MVP needing a big win and rumours of Benoit being moved over to Raw, expect MVP to win this one via some type of cheating to become the new United States champion.

Shawn Michaels vs. WWE Champion John Cena

The build up to this match has been all about when or if Michaels will turn on Cena and attack him prior to the match. Since this is being written before any of this week's WWE TV shows take place, we obviously can't know if there will be any such episode this week, but I doubt it.

Regarding the match itself, I see it playing out in a similar fashion to the Piper-Hart match from WrestleMania VIII, with the twist of both men having the opportunity to cheat, but neither man taking advantage of it. The outcome of the match could go either way, but I see Michaels getting at least one more run at the title and this could be the perfect time to do it. Besides, if Benoit is heading to Raw, who wouldn't want to see a series of title matches between him and Michaels?

Battle of the Billionaires

Even with two World Title matches on the card, this match is the one getting all the hype and even some mainstream media coverage. Heck, even my Mom knew that Donald Trump showed up on Raw for some reason. Usually hair vs. hair matches are not worthy of this much hype, but the idea of either Trump or WWE owner Vince McMahon being shaved bald is an exception.

Out of the two men in the match,

the focus has been on ECW World Heavyweight Champion Bobby Lashley to the point of overexposure, with his appearing on virtually every WWE broadcast over the past few weeks. Most people can't imagine Trump agreeing to shave his head, and that, combined with Lashley's monster push, makes it seem obvious that McMahon's representative Umaga will be defeated.

However, think of all the press Trump would receive upon shaving his famous hair. He'd probably be praised since many people think it would be an improvement. I still think that McMahon will be the one getting his head shaved, but don't be too surprised if they start a McMahon-Lashley feud by having Vince help Umaga cheat his way into a victory.

World Heavyweight Champion Batista vs. The Undertaker

With his 14-0 record at The Showcase of the Immortals every year, people wonder if this is the year that someone will end the streak and give the Deadman his first ever Mania loss. Usually it's a foregone conclusion that Taker will pick up the win, but by making this year's match a World Championship match, it makes that first loss seem like a realistic possibility.

Don't expect too much from this match; but maybe the Undertaker can guide Batista to a decent one. Hopefully WWE realizes that Batista isn't the right man to end Taker's streak (I don't think it should ever be broken, but that's another topic entirely) and has Taker pick up the win to start his fifth world title reign.

ECW Originals vs. The New Breed

One of the least important matches on the card -- but one of the ones I'm most interested in -- the feud between the New Breed and the ECW Originals has been a welcome addition to the ECW brand. So far the New Breed has gotten the better of the Originals most of the time, but Mania could be the stage

for the Originals revenge.

The wild card in this match is CM Punk and which group, if any, he chooses to side with. Over the past few weeks New Breed leader Elijah Burke has been trying to convince Punk to join his team, going so far as to help Punk defeat Hardcore Holly on last week's broadcast. At this point it would make sense for Punk to join either side, but I think the feuds he could have against the New Breed have more potential than those against the Originals, so look for Dreamer and the Originals to get the win.

Ashley vs. Melina

Although Melina is talented both in terms of in-ring skills and charisma, she's not quite good enough to carry the inexperienced Ashley to a good match. It probably won't be horrible, but it won't be anywhere near the quality of Mickie James vs. Trish Stratus at last year's WrestleMania.

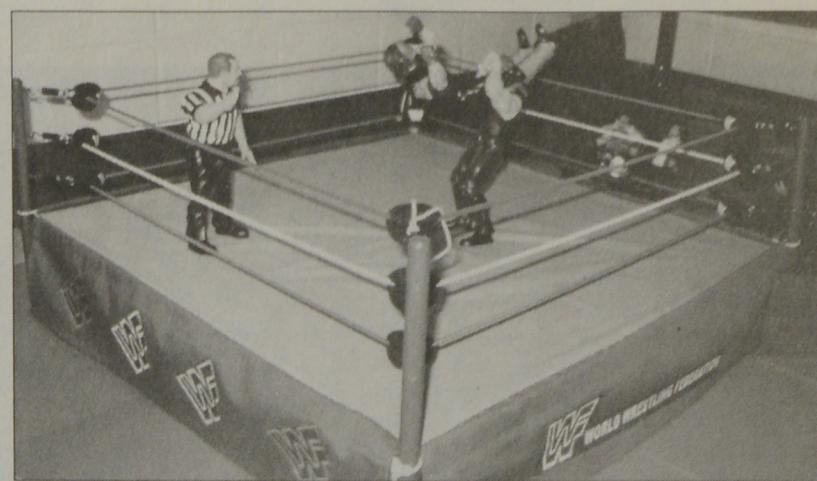
I'm not sure who will pick up the win, but Ashley seems the more likely choice. An Ashley win could also set up feuds with Victoria or Jillian Hall, while Melina could take on Mickie James or perhaps the recently signed Natalie Neidhart if she retains the title.

Those are all the matches announced as of press time, but fans can also expect Aretha Franklin to perform America the Beautiful to kick off the event (just as she did 20 years earlier) and performances from Ludacris and Timbaland.

Like most WrestleManias, this year's event has the potential to be better than the sum of its parts if all the performers raise their game for the biggest event of the year. Will it be better than last year's show? Probably not, although it will still be an entertaining event, with either the Money in the Bank ladder match or Cena vs. Michaels earning Match of the Night honours.

Even if the show somehow falls below expectations, it's still WrestleMania, and it doesn't get much better than that.

So you want to be a pro wrestler?



Internet

by Tony von Richter

Professional wrestling is a unique business: Not quite respected in the sports world but not embraced by the entertainment world, pro wrestling is an island unto itself, with rules and customs that are not usually shared with outsiders. How does one break into such a secretive industry? It's not like ads for main event wrestlers appear in the classifieds section of the newspaper; so how does someone go about becoming a professional wrestler?

According to former ECW, WCW, and WWE wrestler and current Storm Wrestling Academy head Lance Storm, the first thing people should do is look at themselves and see if they have either the size or the athletic ability to be a wrestler.

"So many people think that it is 'fake' and therefore easy, and nothing could be farther from the truth. Look at people currently in the industry, at your size and build, and decide whether you honestly think you have similar ability," says Storm.

Once you've decided that you'd be able to make it in the business, the next step is to get training, and like most other things, if you want to get training, you go to school. With all wrestling schools claiming to offer basically the same thing, how do you determine the good schools from the bad ones?

"I think first and foremost you have to look at who is going to be teaching you and what qualifications they have. If the person who is teaching you is not an accomplished, well rounded and respected worker, how are they going to be able to show you how to become one? If you are taught sloppy habits, you will become a sloppy worker, and your chances of becoming a success become slimmer. And they are slim enough at the best of times," says Storm.

Another thing to watch out for is who will actually be performing the training, as Famous Pro Wrestler's School is sometimes taught by a trainee of Famous Pro Wrestler, and not the person you signed up to learn from. Finally, prospective students should see if enrollment is for a specific class or if students will be lumped together regardless of talent or experience. If the latter is the case, often the less experienced students will get all the attention, leaving other students with less than what they paid for.

While most pro wrestling schools claim to offer the same basic training, the curriculum does vary from school to school. Some schools offer just the basic training, while others, such as the Storm Wrestling Academy, provide basic training as

well as ring psychology, locker room etiquette, promo and character development and general tips for life in the industry.

"A lot of people get eaten up in this business with financial issues or drug issues, and I cover a lot of that as well. I talk to students about how to save their money and how to avoid the pitfalls of drug use in this business," says Storm.

"I had a fairly lengthy career and I managed to remain happily married, drug free, as well as financially stable, despite never being a top, seven-figure money earner. Surviving this industry is a tough task, so I pass on as much knowledge as I can."

Okay, so you've found a school and gotten proper training. Now what? It's not like you walk from the training class straight to Monday Night Raw (not unless you're 6'9" and 300 pounds, of course) so it's off to the indie scene, a collection of small promotions offering little money and even smaller crowds.

This lack of middle ground between the indies and the major promotions like WWE is something that concerns Storm.

"It can be very much feast-or-famine in the industry, which is hard on the guys. When I started there was a gradual progression where I could see that I was making progress."

"Today you can be treading water, endlessly unsure if you will ever make it and then one day -- boom! -- get the break and be home free. When you tread water for so long, it's hard to decide if that break will ever come, so I think it is harder on guys now."

The fact is that there are very few people who can make a living in professional wrestling, and of the three largest North American promotions (World Wrestling Entertainment, Total Nonstop Action Wrestling, and Ring of Honor) only WWE runs a consistent weekly schedule of events so performers can make money every week.

In the end, professional wrestling, just like the sports and entertainment worlds that shun it, is an incredibly difficult business to find success in. That's not to say that it can't happen -- some guys go from unknown to superstar virtually overnight -- but there is also the guy who has worked for years and never had his shot at the big time.

And after all that, if you still want to be a wrestler what's the one thing you should learn, according to Lance Storm?

"Drugs and pain pills kill! I harp on my students about that endlessly. Make good choices now so you are around to make more choices later."

For those seriously interested in wrestling training, check out the Storm Wrestling Academy website at stormwrestling.com.

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